

Buddhaghosa

and the Tradition of the First Council

Jotiya Dhirasekera

University of Ceylon

July - October, 1957

Reprinted from the *UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW*

Vol. XV, Nos. 3 & 4

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Re-presented with a few additional comments and no revision whatsoever

by the author in January 2001

now as

Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

History and vicissitudes of the Pañcanikāya & Catunīkāya of the Sutta Piṭaka

Of the three Piṭakas in the Pali language [*Piṭakattaya*] which are believed to contain the Buddha-vacana or the teachings of the Buddha, we are of the opinion that two only, in their present literary form, namely the Sutta and the Vinaya, have a claim to go back to the time of the Buddha. Some of the earliest accounts in the Suttas themselves records these both as Dhamma and Vinaya as well as Sutta and Vinaya. In the Mahāparinibbāṇasutta, the Buddha himself declares that he himself, for the benefit of the disciples has preached the Dhamma and promulgated the rules of the Vinaya [*Yo vo mayā ānanda **dhammo** ca **vinayo** ca desito paññatto so vo maccayena satthā*]. In the same sutta, the Buddha uses the terms **sutta** and **vinaya** to refer to these same two categories of his life-time two-fold teaching [***sutte** otāretabbāni **vinaye** sandassetabbāni*].

For the next best record of authentic information regarding the extent of Buddhist literature available at the time of the passing away of the Buddha, both by way of his basic teaching or **Dhamma** and the regulatory principles for the guidance of the lives of his disciples [**Vibhaṅga**] and their community life [**Khandhaka**] which collectively went under the name of **Vinaya**, we turn to another source, namely the Vinaya Piṭaka, i.e. Vin. IV. Cullavagga Ch. XI. where we get what is believed to be a Canonical account of the proceedings of the First Buddhist Council at which the literary corpus of Buddhism was examined by eminently reliable authorities and stamped as authentic.

The traditional accounts regarding this First Buddhist Council preserved to us in Pali literature, Canonical and non-Canonical, are by no means homogeneous. Chapter XI of the Cullavagga in the Vinaya-piṭaka is the oldest record we possess of the events of the First Council and is the only one in Pali literature which is of canonical antiquity. The great Commentator Buddhaghosa unhesitatingly declares it to be so. [Paṭhamasaṅgīti nāma cesā kiñcāpi Vinayapitake tantimārūlhā ... DA.I. Introduction]. Nevertheless, it may safely be inferred that this account, closely associated with the account of the Second Council [CV. XII], is at least a hundred years later than the event of which it purports to record. Centuries have passed between this account in the Cullavagga and the next most valuable information we come across in the chronicles of Ceylon [Sri Lanka] - the Dīpavamsa and the Mahāvamsa. The accounts of the Dīpavamsa and the Mahāvamsa are in themselves only the finalised statements of traditional accounts which are very much older than the time of their compilation. There was probably also a great deal more which was not recorded. The great Commentator Buddhaghosa, whom the literary records of Ceylon [Sri Lanka] present to us as having worked under the guidance of the monks of the Mahāvihāra, seems to make good some of these omissions.

On a careful analysis of these various accounts concerning the First Council, it is possible to discern a whole host of accretions around the bare and simple

version of the Cullavagga. The additions to this historical kernel, in the course of nearly eight centuries, seem to proceed on very definite lines prompted by subsequent developments connected with the major event. In describing the First Council, the Cullavagga simply states that on hearing the irreverent words of Subhadda, the elder Mahākassapa thought it fit to determine the contents of what he called **dhamma** and **vinaya** by a consensus of opinion before any corruptions or perversions set in. The conduct of Subhadda being the immediate cause for the summoning of the council, the elder Mahākassapa very naturally begins with the Vinaya* and Cullavagga does not attempt to explain this precedence of the Vinaya over the Sutta.

Here Buddhaghosa finds room to expand on the old tradition of the Cullavagga.¹ And he uses this opportunity, no doubt, to give the authority and sanctity of antiquity to an idea which was gaining ground. The very significant part played by the Vinaya at the Second Council and in the circumstances which led to it must have been very clear to Buddhaghosa and to many of his predecessors who were acquainted with the events of all the early Buddhist Councils. The *dasavatthūni* or the ten disputed points which are given in the Cullavagga² as the subject of controversy at the Second Council and the disagreement on which led to the breaking away of Mahāsaṅghikas from the orthodox body which was later designated as Theriyavāda, are essentially matters of Buddhist Vinaya. Thus it is very natural to infer that there must have been a section of the fraternity, who in the light of the experience of the past, looked upon any disputes on monastic discipline as detrimental to the stability of the sāsaṇa. Thus, in the introductory verses to the historical portion of the

* It is also probably for this reason that the compiler of Cullavagga XI calls this whole council a *vinayaśaṅgīti* in spite of the recital of Dhamma by Ananda at that council. Vide note 14

¹ Sumaṅgalavilāsinī I. 11 Samantapāsādikā I. 13

² Vinaya II. 294

Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa gives a descriptive definition of the Vinaya³ which speaks of it as being the backbone of the Buddha-sāsana. On a comparison of the Pali Samantapāsādikā with its Chinese translation - Shan chien lu pi po sha - Sanghabhadra, translated into Chinese in A.D. 489, within the same century of the compilation of the original in Pali, we note that while verses 6 - 16 of the Pali version in which Buddhaghosa acknowledges his indebtedness to the old *aṭṭhakathās* of Ceylon and distinguished scholars of the Mahāvihāra are omitted in the Chinese translation, Sanghabhadra somehow manages to include the tribute which Buddhaghosa pays to the Vinaya-piṭaka: Chih yen pi ni i Ling cheng fa chiu chu - Let me expound the meaning of the Vinaya in order that the true dharma may last long.

Perhaps it would have been difficult to ignore this allusion as Buddhaghosa, while describing the proceedings at the First Council, has cleverly woven into the text of both the Sumaṅgalavilāsini⁴ and the Samantapāsādikā⁵ this idea almost in identical words. This too, is faithfully reproduced in the Chinese translation of the Samantapāsādikā.⁶ The Chinese also did show a keen interest in the study of the Vinaya from early times.⁷ Fa Hsien undertook the hazardous journey to the land of the Buddha in A.D. 399 for the sole purpose of finding out correct texts of Vinaya rules. Almost three hundred years later, I Ching followed him on a similar mission. This tradition is also preserved in later Pali works like the

³ SP. 1.1. verse 5.

*Yasmim ṭhite sāsanaṃ aṭṭhitassa
patitṭhitam hoti susaṅghitassa
tam vaṇṇayissam vinayam amissam
nissāya pubbācariyānubhāvaṃ*

⁴ SV. 1.11 *Bhikkhū āhamsu: Bhante mahakassapa vinayo nāma Buddhasāsanaṃ āyu vinaye ṭhite sāsanaṃ ṭhitam hoti. Tasmā paṭhamam vinayam saṅgāyāma ' ti.*

⁵ SP. 1. 13.

⁶ Pi ni tsang che shih fo fa shou. Pi ni tsang chu fo fa i chu.

⁷ Travels of Fa Hsien: Translated by Legge p. 98.

Mahābodhivamsa - eleventh century⁸, and the Saddhammasaṅgaha - fourteenth century⁹. At the commencement of the *sangiti*, according to the above tradition, the elder Mahākassapa is made to ask the members of the congregation whether they are to recite the Dhamma or the Vinaya first. This in turn enables the monks to point out the significance of the Vinaya for the stability and well-being of the Sāsana. This partiality for the Vinaya, it may be argued, owes its origin to the followers of the Pali tradition of the Cullavagga which regarded disputes about the rules of monastic discipline as the basis of the first schisms of the Order. It is evidently the view held by the Theriyaparamparā, who tried to put the entire blame for the split of the Sangha at the Second Council on the other party, by presenting them as miscreants violating the rules of monastic discipline.

But turning now to the accounts of the chronicles, we note that the Dīpavamsa preserves for us an older and more unitary concept of the sāsana in the following verse.¹⁰

*Yāva tiṭṭhanti saddhammā saṅgaham na vinassati
tāvatā sāsanaaddhānaṃ ciraṃ tiṭṭhati satthuno.*

Here the word saddhamma, no doubt, means the teaching of the Master taken as a whole, undivided, including both the Dhamma and the Vinaya. The Dhamma and the Vinaya are also referred to severally in the Dīpavamsa accounts of the Councils but they are at least implicitly taken as being complementary to each other. The Buddha had already expressed in the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta¹¹ that the Dhamma and the Vinaya would serve in the role of the Master after his death. As long as these hold sway - *yāva tiṭṭhanti*

⁸ Mahābodhivamsa 91

⁹ J.P.T.S. 1890 p.24

¹⁰ Dīpavamsa Ch. IV. v.17

¹¹ Dīghanikāya II. 154

saddhammā, and the authority of the compilations of the *saṅgīti* remain unchallenged - *saṅgahaṃ na vinassati*, so long will the stability of the *sāsana* be assured. Thus it is quite clear from the *Dīpavamsa* account of the First Council that it does not subscribe to the tradition which singles out the *Vinaya* and gives it precedence over the *Dhamma*. Nor does the *Mahāvamsa* seem to differ from the *Dīpavamsa* in this respect. The author of the *Mahāvamsa* refers to the purpose of the First Council in such terms as *saddhammaṭṭhapanatthāya muninānuggahaṃ kataṃ kātuṃ saddhammasaṅgītim*¹² which are resonant of the account of the *Dīpavamsa*, and he sums up the proceedings of the First Council very briefly thus: *evaṃ sattahi māsehi dhammasaṅgīti niṭṭhitā*.¹³ This, it must be pointed out, is in marked contrast to the version of the *Cullavagga* which calls the First Council a *vinaya-saṅgīti* and ends with the words *tasmā ayaṃ vinayasāṅgīti pañcasatī ti vuccati*.¹⁴

On the other hand *Dīpavamsa*, which virtually ignores the tradition which attaches special importance to the *Vinaya*, goes out of its way in the description of the activities of the First Council to make a few observations on the *Sutta-piṭaka* and its recital. The second of the two accounts of the First Council in the *Dīpavamsa*¹⁵ says that after the *Vinaya* and the *Dhamma* were recited by *Upali* and *Ananda* respectively, these two masters of the *Sutta* - *suttakovidā* - clarified what had been taught in long expositions and also without exposition, the natural meaning as well as the recondite meaning.

Jinassa santike gahita-dhammavinayā ca te ubho

¹² *Mahāvamsa* Ch. 3. vv.7 &8

¹³ *Ibid* Ch. 3. v. 37.

¹⁴ *Vinaya* II. 292. De la Vallee Poussin makes the following observation on this point. "Does it mean that the council was occupied exclusively with discipline, and that *Cullavagga* XI, section 8 has been interpolated after Chapter XI had received the title." *Indian Antiquary* 1908 p. 9. However, we do not see sufficient reason for pushing the second part of the argument so far.

¹⁵ *Dīpavamsa* V. 12 & 13

*Upālithero ca Anando saddhamme pāramīgato
pariyāyadesitañ cāpi atho nippariyāyadesitaṃ
nītatthañ ceva neyyatthaṃ dīpimsu suttakovidā.*

Pariyāya and *nippariyāya desanā* are terms generally used in discussing the mode of teaching in the Sutta and the Abhidhamma respectively. The former refers to the illustrated discourses of the Suttanta as opposed to the *nippariyāya* or abstract, general statements of the Abhidhamma. The confusion between *nītattha* and *neyyattha*, the natural meaning and the meaning to be inferred, is given in the Anguttaranikaya¹⁶ as leading to a false accusation of the Buddha and his teaching. *Yo ca neyyatthaṃ suttantaṃ nītattho suttanto ti dīpeti yo ca nītatthaṃ suttantaṃ neyyattho suttanto ti dīpeti. Ime kho bhikkhave tathāgataṃ abbhācikkhanti.* These distinctions between *nītattha* and *neyyattha* and *pariyāya* and *nippariyāya desanā* that are associated here with the Sutta recital of the First Council are of interest to us for the fact that the Dīpavamsa, when it speaks of the origin and development of the Mahāsaṅghikas after the Second Council, refers to the Mahāsaṅgītikā bhikkhus as being ignorant of these distinctions and ascribes the doctrinal differences of the new schools and the subsequent changes effected in their literature to this ignorance.¹⁷ Here the Dīpavamsa also laments the fact that the Mahāsaṅgītikā bhikkhus rejected the authority of the first compilation: `bhinditvā mūlasaṅgahaṃ.¹⁸ It is, no doubt, through the acquaintance with this later event that the warning is uttered, in anticipation, in the earlier account of the First Council when the Dīpavamsa says *yāva tiṭṭhanti saddhammā saṅgahaṃ na vinassatī.*¹⁹

Now it is therefore possible to observe that the development of the

¹⁶ Anguttaranikaya I. 60 ; Manorathapurani II. 118.

¹⁷ Dipavamsa V. 33-37

¹⁸ Ibid. V. 32

¹⁹ Ibid. IV. 17.

Dīpavamsa tradition regarding the First Council, with special concern for the Sutta-piṭaka and the manner of comprehending and interpreting the doctrine, finds a parallel in the tradition of Buddhaghosa which expands the early Cullavagga account with special leaning on the Vinaya. In the Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa established an unbroken tradition for the Vinaya in India, from the time of the Buddha, through Upali and his pupils, right down to the Third Council: *Evaṃ idaṃ vinaya-piṭakaṃ Jambudīpe tāva imāya ācariya-paramparāya yāva tatiya-saṅgīti tāva ābhatan ' ti veditabbaṃ.*²⁰ From thence it is safely transmitted to Ceylon through Mahinda from whom a Ceylonese thera, Ariṭṭha, masters it. Towards the very end of the historical introduction to Samantapāsādikā,²¹ Buddhaghosa narrates the very beautiful story of the recital of the Vinaya by Ariṭṭha at the request of the thera Mahinda, the reason given for this recital being 'that a lad born in Ceylon of Ceylonese parents and ordained in Ceylon should learn the Vinaya in Ceylon and recite it in order that the *sāsana* established in Ceylon may take root firmly.' Is not Buddhaghosa recording for us here a tradition which makes a **determined effort to implant in Ceylon a loyal school of Vinaya followers?**

The traditional account of the literary activity of the First Council has witnessed the accumulation of a great deal of divergent views around it. Going back to the historical kernel in the Cullavagga, we find specific mention made of venerable Mahākassapa questioning Upali with regard to the four *pārājikas*, in all their details - *vatthu, nidāna, puggala, paññatti, anupaññatti, āpatti* and *anāpatti*. At the end of this, the account refers very briefly to the rest of the Vinaya recital as *Eteneva upāyena ubhato vinaye pucchi. Puṭṭho puṭṭho āyasmā Upāli vissajjesi*. This statement, when closely examined, leads us to the following observations. Chapters XI and XII of the Cullavagga which deal with the First and Second Councils, when viewed from their literary position, appear at the end of

²⁰ SP. I. 32-33

²¹ SP. I. 102

the collection known as the Khandhakas. These Khandhakas are regularly listed in all the later subdivisions of the Vinaya-piṭaka.²² If at the time of the compilation of the Cullavagga account of the First Council the Khandhakas were in existence and the author makes no mention of it, does it point to the existence of a well-founded accurate tradition which would not allow of an anachronism in the hands of compilers a hundred years later. A further point of interest is that Cullavagga XII, with which Cullavagga XI is closely associated in point of time, quotes the Suttavibhaṅga seven times as authority while discussing the validity of the disputed points - *dasavatthūni* - at the Second Council. The Vibhanga,²³ referred to as *ubhato vibhaṅga* or *dve vibhaṅga* or severally as Mahāvibhaṅga and Bhikkhuṇīvibhaṅga, it must be pointed out, heads the list in the later subdivisions of the Vinaya.²⁴ Therefore when the Cullavagga speaks of the contents of the Vinaya recited at the First Council as *ubhato vinaya*, and leaves out any reference to the Vibhanga with which, we may guess, it was familiar at the time the account of the First Council was compiled, we may infer that the rules of monastic discipline of the monks and nuns - *ubhato vinaya* in their earlier form were not concerned with any commentarial explanation or descriptions. *Ubhato vinaya*, for the compiler of the Cullavagga XI, seems also a very safe term under which the earliest contents of Buddhist monastic discipline may be cited without slipping into an error of anachronism. **See P.S. by Bhikkhu Dhammavihari at the end of the article.**

The Cullavagga then proceeds to describe the Sutta recital as follows. The elder Mahākassapa questions Ananda regarding the Brahmajāla and Sāmaññaphala suttas of the Dīghanikāya and in the same manner he is said to have questioned Ananda regarding the five nikāyas. Eten ' eva upāyena

²² SP. I. 15, SV. I. 13, Mahabodhivamsa 92

²³ Vide S. B. E. Vol. XIII. p. XXXI on the terms Vibhanga and Suttavibhanga.

²⁴ SP. I. 15, SV. I. 13, Mahabodhivamsa 92

pañcanikāye pucchi.²⁵ This winds up the literary activity of the First Council with no mention of Abhidhamma in any form. This early tradition regarding the Sutta literature, which was generally designated as dhamma, lent itself to considerable revision and elaboration during the centuries that followed. The earliest Chinese translation of the Vinaya-piṭaka - the Dharmagupta Vinaya translated into Chinese in A.D. 365 - its account of the First Council gives many more details which are not mentioned in the Pali version. Referring to the Sutta recital at the First Council, it agrees with the Cullavagga in recognising five subdivisions in it, but it goes further and gives also the names of the subdivisions. However, on a closer examination of the Chinese text we discover that the Chinese transliteration of the word **āgama**, which is here used in place of the word **nikāya**, is not applied to the fifth division which they choose to refer to as the 'mixed or miscellaneous piṭaka' - *tsa ts'aug*. A list of twelve different works contained in this group is also given. The only other instances in this account of this character *ts'aug*, which means piṭaka, being used are with reference to the Vinaya-piṭaka and the Abhidhamma-piṭaka. Does this imply, at least at the time of the Chinese translation, a separate and independent existence for the fifth division, on account of its character, outside the **nikāya** or **āgama** collections? Of the subsequent Vinaya recensions in Chinese, those of the Mahāsaṅghika and Mahisāsaka schools also agree with the Dharmagupta Vinaya in including the Khuddaka collection as the fifth division in the Suttapiṭaka. The Sarvāstivāda school, Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, on the other hand, make no mention of it.²⁶

Buddhaghosa while describing the literary activity of the First Council in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, where he is evidently drawing on an earlier tradition, also speaks at first only of the Digha, Majjhima, Samyutta and Anguttara as nikāyas, reckoning their extent according to the number of *suttas* and *bhāṇavāras* in the Digha and *bhāṇavāras* alone in the rest. It is these four subdivisions, again, he

²⁵ Vinaya II. 287.

²⁶ Anesaki - Four Buddhist Agamas in Chinese p.8.

has in mind when he speaks of the Suttanta-piṭaka as consisting of four *saṅgītīs*: *suttantapiṭake catasso saṅgītiyo*. These four nikāyas alone, according to the same tradition, were entrusted after recital to famous schools of disciples for safe custody at the First Council.²⁷ The Mahābodhivamsa²⁸ - 11th century - subscribes completely to this view of Buddhaghosa in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī. This account of the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī and the Mahābodhivamsa are also both agreed in introducing the Abhidhamma immediately after the recital of the first four nikāyas, thus winding up as it were the sutta or dhamma recital with those four nikāyas. This idea of the four significant and authoritative subdivisions of the Sutta collection is expressed by Buddhaghosa again in the introductory verses to the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī where he uses the term āgama instead of nikāya and also refers specifically to the Dīghanikāya as Dīghāgama.²⁹

*Majjhe Visuddhimaggo esa catunnaṃ pi āgamānaṃ hi
thatvā pakāsayissati tattha yathābhāsitaṃ atthaṃ.*³⁰

Both Buddhaghosa and the Dīpavamsa seem to go back to the same tradition, not only in upholding the fourfold division of the Sutta-piṭaka, but also in referring to the subdivisions as āgamas.

*Pavibhattā imaṃ therā saddhammaṃ avināsaṃ
vaggapaññāsakaṃ nāma samyuttañ ca nipātakaṃ
āgamapiṭakaṃ nāma akaṃsu suttasammatāṃ.*³¹

²⁷ S.V. I. 14-15

²⁸ Mahābodhivamsa 94

²⁹ SV. I. 2.

³⁰ Ibid. I.2. v 15.

³¹ Dīpavamsa IV. 16. Vagga, Paññāsaka, Samyutta and Nipātaka here clearly refer to the four principal Agamas of what was earlier known as the Suttapiṭaka. We are unable to agree with Gokuldas De who takes this quotation to imply the early existence of a single piṭaka from which 'the three Piṭakas, especially the Vinaya and Sutta emanated' in the Third Council. Democracy in Early Buddhist Sangha - Gokuldas De. p.4

This, however, does not establish the existence of a homogeneous tradition of **four nikāyas or āgamas** in and about the time of Buddhaghosa. The older tradition of the **five nikāyas** seems to have lingered along, even feebly, and forced itself both into the Dīpavamsa and the works of Buddhaghosa, at least outside the main tradition they supported. The Dīpavamsa, while speaking of the Mahāsaṅgītika bhikkhus, makes a very casual reference to the five nikāyas.³² In the Samantapāsādikā³³ Buddhaghosa seems to take up completely the tradition preserved in the Vinaya-piṭaka regarding the Sutta recital at the First Council. This is in marked contrast to his account in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī. Here Buddhaghosa expands and furnishes the details to the Cullavagga line *eten 'eva upāyena pañca nikāye pucchi*. He is, in this context, more faithful to the text on which he proposes to comment than to the tradition. Defining the **pañca nikāya** he refers to them by their names, but of the Khuddaka alone, he gives a descriptive definition in which he reveals to us one definite view of contemporary opinion regarding this nikāya. *Tattha Khuddakanikāyo nāma cattāro nikāye ṭhapetvā avasesaṃ buddhavacanaṃ*.³⁴ He is seen making a further distinction between the Khuddakanikāya and the other four nikāyas in the same account. *Tattha vinayo āyasmataṃ Upālittherena vissajjito. Sesakhuddakanikāyo cattāro ca nikāyā Anandattherena*.

On the other hand, when Buddhaghosa speaks of the Khuddaka-nikāya in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī,³⁵ having wound up the Sutta and Abhidhamma-piṭakas, it is only while recording two divergent traditions regarding the contents of this heterogeneous collection and its place in relation to the rest of the Buddha's teachings. The Dīghabhāṅakas, says Buddhaghosa, affirm the recital of the

³² Dīpavamsa V. 33.

³³ SP. I. 16,

³⁴ SP. I. 16.

³⁵ SP. I. 16

Khuddaka collection at the First Council, but they do not apply the term *nikāya* to it. Denying to this collection the status of a *nikāya*, both *Dīghabhāṇakas* and *Majjhimbhāṇakas* refer to it as *Khuddakagantha*. The *Dīghabhāṇakas* place this collection in the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* and recognise a list of twelve books of which it comprises. The number of books in the *Khuddaka* collection according to the *Dīghabhāṇaka* list, it must be noted again, is the same as in the *Dharmagupta Vinaya* in Chinese. The *Majjhimbhāṇakas* disagree with them and including it in the *Suttanta-piṭaka* add to it the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, *Apadāna* and *Buddhavaṃsa*, thus raising the total number of books in it to fifteen which is the later recognised number of books in this collection. It must be noted here that both these lists, however, do not know of the *Khuddakapāṭha*.

What then is the status of the *Khuddakanikāya* in the *Sutta-piṭaka*? We have already referred to the fact that the *Cullavagga XI*, which is the oldest account we have of the First Council, refers to a fivefold division of the *Sutta-piṭaka* into *nikāyas* without any distinction. Unless this statement is dismissed as an interpolation, it becomes clear from this that at least a hundred years after the passing away of the Buddha, the *Khuddaka-nikāya* must have been known and accepted as the fifth *nikāya* of the *Sutta-piṭaka*. Otto Franke, who says that the two accounts in *Cullavagga XI* and *XII* are but air bubbles, feels constrained to believe the statement about the Five *Nikayas*. The compiler of *Cullavagga XI*, he says, mentions Five *Nikayas*, and we can believe him the more readily, in that relatively early epigraphical evidence testifies to their existence (J.P.T.S. 1908 p. 65). However small it might have been as a collection in its early days, as is implied by its name, that the *Khuddaka* was recognised as a *nikāya* from early days of the *sāsana* is further established by the fact that the period of the *Bharhut stupa*, circa 250 - 200 B.C., also knows this five-fold division of the *Sutta* collection. A *Rail Inscription* there refers to an elder *Bodhi Rakhita* who is a *pañcanekāyika* - a Master of the Five *Nikayas*.³⁶ In the absence of any direct

³⁶ Cunningham : *Stupa of Barhut* 142

evidence, it is not possible to say whether a parallel tradition of four nikāyas existed from earliest times. The Milindapañha, in a reference to learned monks associated with Nagasena, speaks of those who had the Tipitaka, five nikāyas as well four nikāyas.³⁷

*Te ca teṭṭakā bhikkhū pañcanekāyikā pi ca
catunekāyikā c 'eva Nāgasenaṃ purakkharuṃ.* Miln. Trenckner p. 22

Strictly speaking, the term *catunekāyika* here cannot be taken to mean anything more than the selection of four nikāyas for special study. How and why one of the nikāyas has been left out of the known list of five, is the point of interest in this statement. Although the historical kernel of the Milindapanha has been ascribed to the first century A.D., the antiquity of this verse which occurs in Bāhirakathā has yet to be established. It may not be far removed, in point of time, from Buddhaghosa who is keenly aware of this tradition of four nikāyas.

However, that this fourfold division of the Sutta-piṭaka is pre-Buddhaghosa in its origing, is also evident from the fact that the Dīghabhāṇakas themselves, whom Buddhaghosa quotes, are doubtful about the rightful place of the Khuddaka collection in the Sutta-piṭaka, and prefer to put it under the Abhidhamma. This reveals to us the important fact that the nature of the contents of Khuddaka collection must have to some extent undermined the prestige of the Khuddakanikāya as a subdivision of the Sutta-piṭaka. There is also evidence of a post-Buddhaghosa literary tradition which seems to have held fast to this view of four nikāyas. The Mahābodhivamsa agrees with the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, after which the Khuddaka collection, referred to as the Khuddakavatthu and not as nikāya, is recited.³⁸ It is in the Saddhammasaṅgaha, generally placed towards the end of the 14th century, that we get a list which seems to restore fully the five

Barua & Sinha : Barhut Inscriptions 28 - 30.

³⁷ Milindapañha: Trenckner 22.

³⁸ Mahabodhivamsa 94

nikāya division and establish for its canonical authority at the First Council level. The complete collection of the Khuddaka is called a nikāya at the time of the recital and is recited and placed immediately after the Anguttara as the fifth nikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka. However, true to the tradition preserved by Buddhaghosa, this nikāya, unlike the others, is not assigned to any school of disciples.³⁹

After a comprehensive description of the activities of the First Council both in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī and Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa enumerates the various classifications of the whole of the Buddha's teaching known in his day. *Evaṃ etaṃ sabbaṃ pi buddhavacanaṃ rasavasena ekavidhaṃ* etc. In his comments on the diverse classifications, Buddhaghosa provides us with a wealth of tradition with which it is not possible to deal here. Nevertheless, two things are relevant to our present study. Buddhaghosa who quoted the Bhāṅakas in the most detached manner to indicate the contents of the Khuddaka collection, knows now of a Khuddaka-nikāya consisting of fifteen books which also includes the Khuddakapāṭha, unknown in the lists of the Bhāṅakas quoted above.⁴⁰ The number of books in the Khuddaka collection seems to have been fixed at fifteen probably prior to the addition of the Khuddakapāṭha, for when the Khuddakapāṭha is added on to the already known Majjhimabhāṅaka list of fifteen works, the Mahāniddeśa and Cullāniddeśa of the earlier list are immediately treated as one single work. This keeps the total number of works in the collection unaltered at fifteen.

The Chinese translation of Samantapāsādikā which we have quoted above, on the other hand, does not contain the Khuddakapāṭha in its list of the works of the Khuddakanikāya and it refers to fourteen instead of fifteen subdivisions. Takakusu and Nagai say in their edition of the Samantapasadika⁴¹ that this

³⁹ Saddhammasaṅgaha 26 - 27

⁴⁰ SV. I. 15. SP. I. 16.

⁴¹ S.P. I. 18 n.5.

proves that the Khuddakapāṭha therefore is an interpolation later than A.D. 489. But we fail to see how the point is thereby established. The earliest lists of the contents of the Khuddakanikāya preserved in Pali are those of the Dīgha and Majjhimabhāṅgaka. Both these speak of the Niddesa as two different works, severally named as Mahāniddesa and Cullaniddesa. And the earliest lists where the two are treated as one, as in the Chinese Samantapāsādikā, are in the Samantapāsādikā (I. 189) and Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (I. 17) which also include the Khuddakapāṭha as one of the fifteen works. Therefore we are more inclined to think that the inclusion of the Khuddakapāṭha and the treatment of the Niddesa as one work went, more or less, hand in hand. In the Chinese Samantapāsādikā the Niddesa is treated as one work and the Khuddakapāṭha is not found. The very nature of the Khuddakapāṭha might have led the Chinese translator to discriminate against it.

Buddhaghosa, in the course of his literary comments, brings to light a new *pañcanikāya* theory which is equally revealing.⁴² According to this, the five nikāyas are collectively meant to contain the whole of the Buddha's teachings. As the first four nikāyas retain their true sutta character, this has been made possible by making the Khuddakanikāya so elastic as to include within it the whole of the Vinaya and Abhidhammapiṭakas, besides its own collection of fifteen works. *Katamo khuddakanikāyo. Sakalaṃ vinayapiṭakaṃ abhidhammapiṭakaṃ khuddakapāṭhādayo ca pubbe nidassitapañcadasabhedā ṭhapetvā cattāro nikāye avasesaṃ buddhavacanaṃ.*

*ṭhapetvā caturo p'ete nikāye dīghādiḍike
tadaññaṃ buddhavacanaṃ nikāyo khuddako mato ' ti.*

Buddhaghosa also speaks of five nikāyas including the Khuddaka as subdivisions of the Suttantapiṭaka while commenting on the threefold division of

⁴² SV. I. 22 - 23

the Buddhavacana into Vinaya, Suttanta and Abhidhamma.⁴³ Buddhaghosa, by this classification of the whole of the Buddha's teachings into five nikayas and this new definition of the Khuddakanikāya, seems to restore to the Khuddaka its title of nikāya in a new guise. This new classification seems to have been advantageous not only to the Khuddaka-nikāya but also to the Abhidhammapīṭaka which thereby found for itself a definite place even in the oldest division of the Buddha's teachings into Dhamma and Vinaya. Its place in the Suttapīṭaka could not be doubted any longer.⁴⁴

In the divergent and almost contradictory comments and traditions which Buddhaghosa has included both in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (SV.) and the *Samantapāsādikā* (SP.) we see the great regard which he has for contemporary opinion and his attempts at reconciliation as distinct from the high fidelity with which he records earlier traditions.

Since writing this article we have read Professor E. Lamotte's study of the Khuddakanikāya in *Problèmes concernant les textes canoniques "mineurs"* - *Journal Asiatique*: Tome CCXLIV. Année 1956 Fascicule no. 3. We seem to share some problems

in common which we have approached from different angles. Hence we should like to conclude with the following observations.

Perhaps the author has in mind the account of the Cullavagga XI when he says that it is the Sinhalese tradition - la tradition Singhalaïse - which takes the compilation of the Khuddakanikāya to have been effected at the same time as the beginnings of Buddhism, i.e. at the Council of Rajagaha. We have already endeavoured to show the significant corroboration which this tradition of the Cullavagga receives from inscriptional records of Barhut and Sanchi. (Vide n.

⁴³ SV. I. 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid. I. 16. II 565-566.

35). We would readily admit, as stated earlier, that as the very name Khuddaka suggests, this collection at first must have been relatively small. However, we find it difficult to ignore the fact that if the theory of Five Nikayas which we find in the Cullavagga was known early, the Khuddaka then would have very naturally borne the title of a nikāya. If when he says "Rien ne permet d'affirmer que cette collection ait été compilée avant l'époque de Buddhaghosa au v siècle de notre ère," he means that this collection did not take its final form before the time of Buddhaghosa, we would give as further proof of this gradual accumulation of the Khuddakanikāya the inclusion of the Khuddakapāṭha in the present list of fifteen works of which it comprises, perhaps as late as the time of Buddhaghosa. (Vide n. 39)

We have already stated that as far as we are aware neither the Dīgha- nor Majjhimabhāṅakas know of the Khuddakapāṭha as a work of the Khuddakanikāya. But on this negative evidence alone we are unable to go so far as to state that the Dīghabhāṅakas and Majjhimabhāṅakas excluded the Khuddakapāṭha from their Khuddaka collections. For he says: "A Ceylan, au temps de Buddhaghosa (v siècle), l'école des Dighabhanaka excluait du *Khuddanikaya* trois sections - Khuddakapatha, Cariyapitaka et Apadana - et rattachait les douze autres à l'*Abhidhammapitaka*. Par contre les Majjhimabhanaka, après avoir éliminé le *Khuddakapatha*, faisaient passer le restant dans le *Suttapitaka*." (Sumangalavilasini p. 15). What then, may we ask, is the fate of the Buddhavamsa? Do the Dīghabhāṅakas retain it in their Khuddaka collection? Then and only then can the Majjhimabhāṅakas who, according to the statement quoted above, add nothing to this collection, come to possess it. But on the evidence of the Sumaṅgalavilāsini, the situation is something very different. The Dīghabhāṅakas have no Buddhavamsa while the Majjhimabhāṅakas have three additional texts over the Dīghabhāṅakas in Cariyāpiṭaka, Apadāna and Buddhavamsa.

The author has also drawn our attention to a reference in the Atthasālinī p.26

which refers to the Khuddakanikāya as consisting of fourteen books. But the authenticity of this statement, we notice, is somewhat weakened when we compare it with the list of the works of Khuddakanikāya given on p.18 of the same work. It is identical with the other lists of fifteen works in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī and Samantapāsādikā which also refer definitely to the Khuddakanikāya as *pannarasabhedo*. But the Atthasālinī here leaves out this record of the numerical strength of the Khuddakanikāya as consisting of fifteen works, perhaps, we may assume, with definite motive of being able to allude to this fourteen-fold division. Being unable to determine which of the fifteen works was meant to be excluded in the Atthasālinī, we cannot say anything more at present.

In support of his theory of the existence of a Sūtrapīṭaka in Four Agamas the author also quotes two Chinese versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra. But these exist for us only in the form of translations, dating from a period not very much earlier than the fourth century A.D. Thus we are unable to accept their 'canonical antiquity' except in a restricted sense, and there is no guarantee that they do not embody a later tradition moulded in keeping with the views of those responsible for the various recensions.

The Ceylon Thera Sudinna who is referred to in the article, no doubt provides an interesting divergence of opinion. His sole criterion for testing the authenticity of the Buddhavacana is the literary pattern, i.e. conformity to the sutta type. Anything which does not bear the title of sutta, says Sudinna, is not the word of the Buddha. That this is a weak argument resulting from a misconception is clear from the fact that the very early ninefold division of the *navāṅgasatthusāsana* which covers the word of the Buddha knows many literary forms besides the sutta. Further, and what is more relevant here, we cannot but point out the fact that immediately preceding the statement of Sudinna quoted above is a very categorical statement to the contrary, viz. that there are many saying of the Buddha which are not all cast in the sutta pattern: *asuttanāmakam hi*

Buddhavacanaṃ nāma atthi seyyathīdaṃ Jātakaṃ....Apadānan 'ti.(SV II.566).

And Sudinna is here quoted by Buddhaghosa only in order to take note of a dissentient view. The heterogeneous and unorthodox character of the contents of the Khuddakanikāya which is the subject of dispute here too, we have already suggested, must have led to its exclusion from the orthodox Sutta collection, and our hypothesis of the independent existence of the Khuddakanikāya outside the Four Principal Nikayas at later date finds support in the comment "Cependant, tout en refusant de les incorporer dans l'ensemble du Tripitaka, les Sarvastivadin curent aussi des Textes mineurs qu'ils citent frequemment dans leurs ouvrages sous le titre de Ksudraka, et les Mahayanistes qui pour les écrits canoniques sont tributaires des Sarvastivadin font de ces Ksudraka un Pitaka special, distinct du Tripitaka traditionnel."

JOTIYA DHIRASEKERA

P.S. by Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

The author of the article, Jotiya Dhirasekera, is presently Bhikkhu Dhammavihari who took to the monastic life in 1990. At the time of putting this article into the internet, June 2000, he now writes.

At the time the Cullavagga records the proceedings of the First Buddhist Council and says *Eten' eva upāyena ubhato vinaye pucchi*, the compilers had before them, we guess, very nearly the whole of both Mahāvibhaṅga and Bhikkhuṇīvibhaṅga and a fair amount of the Khandhaka Vinaya. **Ubhato Vinaya** as a comprehensive term, we believe, included both. While the **Vibhaṅgas** [as the explanatory - *suvibhattāni suvinicchitāni* - Law Books of the Pātimokkhas] took care of the personal spiritual life of the monks and nuns, the **Khandhaka Vinaya** [ecclesiastical Law Book of Procedure for the monastic community] was needed to regulate the activities of the twofold Saṅgha. We believe that both, at least in their in basic nuclear form, had to exist and be in operation from the very early

days of the Sāsana.

We were accustomed to seeing the Pali texts of the Cullavagga [Sri Lankan, P.T.S. etc.]⁴⁵ carry the reading as **ubhato vinaye** in reporting the recital by venerable Upali of the Vinaya literature that was available at the time of the first *saṅgīti*, after the passing away of the Buddha. We all respected the comprehensiveness of the term **vinaya** in this context and took it to include all relevant material pertaining both to the spiritual and the administrative aspects of the Buddhist clergy, both male and female. Perhaps it was all too simple for the Commentary, the Samantapāsādikā to explain it any further.

We now notice that the editing of Buddhist texts carried out during the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā held in Myanmar, in celebration of the Buddha Jayanti, **has brought a serious change in our official Sri Lankan text.** The reading they adopt is **ubhato vibhaṅge**, rejecting **vinaye** and choosing **vibhaṅge**. The standard Tipiṭaka Pali Texts of Sri Lanka today called the Buddha Jayanti Tipiṭaka- Text Series [JBTS] appear to follow this Myanmar edition. Sri Lanka participated at this momentous event. This new edition of the text [1983] carries it as **ubhato vibhaṅge** and gives **ubhato vinaye** in the foot note as a Sri Lankan variant reading. It does not even refer in a foot note to the existence of the P.T.S. reading **ubhato vinaye** [1930].

We regret very much that the Sri Lankan monk scholars who participated at the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā in Myanmar have completely given into the Myanmar - Thai reading of **ubhato vibhaṅge** and have chosen to abandon our more acceptable age-old Sri Lankan tradition of **ubhato vinaye**. Goenka - CD ROM - edition of the Tripiṭaka also totally follows this Myanmar edition, accepting the **ubhato vbhaṅge** reading.

The choice of the reading **ubhato vibhaṅge** in the Myanmar edition immediately implies to us their rejection of the idea of the existence of a class of Vinaya literature by the name of Khandhaka [i.e. presently consisting of the

Mahāvagga Pāli and the Cullavagga Pāli] at the time of the First Council. The word **vibhaṅga**, we would argue, shuts out the **Khandhaka**. We further argue that something more than the tradition and discipline of the **Vibhaṅga** was needed in the Sāsana, even at the time of the passing away of the Buddha, for the successful and satisfactory continuance of its existence.

Or the question directly is **Is the emergence of what is referred to as the Khandhaka Vinaya something of post-parinibbanic or post-First Council origin? Was not such a thing available at the time of the first *sarigitt*? What then is the justification for the use of an exclusive phrase like *ubhato vibhaṅge* which shuts out the Khandhakas?**

A possible explanation

Venerable Mahākassapa, questioning Venerable Upāli about the Vinaya at the First Council, necessarily begins with the Vibhaṅga which is the first book of the Vinaya Piṭaka. He specifically goes in order through the four Pārājikas with which the Vibhaṅga opens out the code of monastic discipline. Even of the vast book of the Vibhaṅga, only the four Pārājikas are mentioned by name and discussed in detail.

At the end of it when they say *Eten 'eva upāyena*, what is implied is that **in this manner the rest of the entire Vinaya** was gone through [*ubhato vinaye pucchi*]. Not only the Pārājikas. Not only the Vibhaṅgas. But whatever of the entire Vinaya that was available at the time, and undoubtedly including the Khandhakas.

Note that this is also the manner in which the Dhamma, as the counterpart of the Vinaya was gone through at the First Council [On the agenda at the First Council, the recital consisted only of the Dhamma and the Vinaya.]. Here the Dhamma is equated to the *pañca nikāya* [*Etena upāyena pañca nikāye pucchi*] and the whole of it is adequately introduced by the compilers of the Cullavagga by referring to by name only the Brahmajāla and Sāmaññaphala suttas of the

Dīghanikāya.

45 i. Cullavaggapāli [in Sinhala script] by B. Saddhātissa Thera 1915. p. 407 *Ubhato vinaye pucchi*. Strangely enough, we also know of a single Sinhala script edition of 1909, edited by a lay person, which carries the reading *ubhato vibhaṅge*. [Note the impact of traditions of foreign Buddhist countries like Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia on Sri Lankan Buddhist thinking, both literary and religious. The impact has been both on the monk and lay communities. They are yet to be correctly evaluated].

ii. Cullavagga Pāli II [in Sinhala script] Buddhist Congress Tri-Piṭaka Series. Pali Text edited by G.P. Malalasekera 1951. Vol. IV. p. 512 *Ubhato vinaye pucchi*. The Editor indicates in a foot note the variant reading *Ubhato vibhaṅge pucchi* as occurring in the Burmese [Myanmar] and Siamese [Thai] texts - [*vibhaṅge* B. & S.].